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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the formation of the Appalachian Consortium, assesses its impact after one year of operation, and examines its future development. Consortium goals were to provide in-service, staff development opportunities for the instructional faculties of the consortium's member colleges (three community colleges and a state university) and through these activities to become an integrative resource focusing on regional developmental needs. The consortium chose to concentrate on three dimensions of the development process: professional, curricular, and institutional. A competitive "mini-grant" proposal procedure was selected to effect the development process. The first competition round took place in December 1977 and the second in March 1978. Seven proposals were approved covering such subjects as reading, art, political science, education, mathematics, nursing, and biological science. The consortium coordinator initiated a series of processes necessary in realizing consortium goals; these included publishing a quarterly newsletter, residential consultation, and opening a consortium office. The first year of the consortium seemed to support the validity of the concept in engaging staff development needs. A staff development proposal format is appended. (TR)

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THE HILLS ARE ALIVE:

THE APPALACHIAN CONSORTIUM APPROACH TO STAFF DEVELOPMENT

A Paper Presented

At The

58th Annual Convention

Of The

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Atlanta, Georgia

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Introduction

Examine the current literature on post-secondary education. A perusal of text, footnotes, and bibliographies are likely to contain no mention of academic consortia. Yet, the consortium approach to the issues currently confronting post-secondary education is widespread and growing rapidly.[1]

One of the most visible issues in education today is staff development. The need for development activity has been brought about by reducing enrollments and skrinking budgets which have limited faculty and staff mobility. The need for the use of consortia in staff development activity was suggested by this author: The consortium "included more people, more efficiently, for less cost, than we are now doing."[2]

The purpose of this paper is to describe the formation of a consortium designed to foster staff development, assess its impact after one year of operation, and examine the future development of the consortium.

The Appalachian Consortium

Appalachia is a region of the United States containing 19 million people who reside in 13 states. The region has a high degree of economic deprivation with the resultant social and political problems. In 1965, the federal government passed the Appalachian Regional Development Act designed to foster the regeneration of the region. In each of the 13 states, a service agency was established to realize the goal of the Act.

In Maryland, the Appalachian region contains three community colleges and a state university. These institutions are involved with the problems of Appalachia as well as those faced by post-secondary education. Since the inception of the Appalachian development concept, the colleges have been seeking strategies which would permit them to work cooperatively to foster regional development.

In 1976, the Appalachian Regional Commission, located in Washington, D. C., issued a planning manual designed to focus on regional problems that required immediate attention. The publication included a number of questions directed to various sectors of Appalachia. Education was asked:

> How can the technical assistance and training programs of the region's community colleges and universities be coordinated so that they can make the maximum contribution toward revitalizing the development, management, and administration of communities?[3]

The colleges located in Appalachian Maryland accepted the question as a challenge containing two inter-related problems. First, the institutions were aware that to serve as revitalizers of development, management, and administration within the region, their faculty and staff must be functioning effectively and efficiently. Institutional self-renewal through staff development was essential. Second, the four colleges could engage regional revitalization most expeditiously through a cooperative process. Therefore, the formation of a consortium was undertaken.

Representatives from Allegany Community College, Frostburg State College, Garrett Community College, and Hagerstown Junior

College met and designed the Appalachian Staff Development Consortium. Funding was obtained from the Appalachian Regional Commission. The consortium began operation in July, 1977. The organization and operation of the consortium is worthy of examination.

Consortium: Organization and Operation

The goals of the consortium are to provide inservice, staff development opportunities for the instructional faculties of the post-secondary educational institutions in Appalachian Maryland. Further, through the development activities, the institutions seek to become an integrative resource focusing on the developmental needs of the region.[4]

The consortium chose to focus on three dimensions of the development process. They are the professional dimension, the curricular dimension, and the institutional dimension. The first provides faculty with the methods and means of participating in organized educational programs designed to enhance growth in specific disciplines. The second dimension provides experiences built around the teaching-learning process; it seeks to capitalize on faculty motivation to improve their classroom performance. The final one is based on the realization that a "developing" institution requires faculty involvement and provides greater opportunity for faculty growth.

The procedure selected to effect the development process is a competitive "mini-grant" proposal procedure. Each college appointed two members to a consortium board. One member comes from the

teaching faculty; the other is an instructional administrator. Guidelines for "mini-grants" were promulgated.* Faculty teams submit proposals to the board. Action on the proposals takes one of three avenues. The proposal is approved; the proposal is approved pending revision; or the proposal is rejected. Obviously, such a process mandates an operational structure.

The grant establishing the consortium provides for a coordinator. This individual is responsible for consortium operation and on-going liaison between the institutions. Specifically, the coordinator transmits project ideas from campus to campus. The consortium guidelines require that a project must have representation from at least two of the four colleges; the coordinator brings the project teams into being. Further, the coordinator works with the teams in the development of the mini-grant projects. Faculty ideas and concepts must be designed and organized so that they are congruent with consortium guidelines. Finally, the coordinator serves as the executive secretary of the consortium board. Such tasks as the consortium newsletter, board minutes, and transmission of board action to "mini-grant" applicants are the coordinator's responsibility.

The design of the consortium seemed congruent with the developmental needs of the post-secondary institutions of Appalachian Maryland. An assessment of the first year of consortium operation will determine the extent of actual congruence.

*see Appendix

Consortium Activity - Year One

The Appalachian Staff Development Consortium was approved by the Appalachian Regional Commission in July, 1977, with official operation scheduled for October 1, 1977. In preparation, college representatives met for the first time in late July.

The initial task was to employ a coordinator. An intensive search resulted in the location of an individual with staff development and consortium experience - Ms. Lee Ann Feltwell. Ms. Feltwell joined the Consortium on October 1, 1977. Her initial responsibility was to begin screening "mini-grant" projects.

The board had drafted "mini-grant" project guidelines prior to the employment of the coordinator. Guidelines had been given to every faculty member at the participating institutions. The board members on each campus assisted the faculty with guideline interpretation.

The first round of "mini-grant' competition occurred in December, 1977. Twelve proposals were reviewed. One was approved; two were approved pending minor modification; one was approved in concept with major modification indicated; and eight were rejected. The four that received approval spanned the gamut of the Consortium's staff development dimensions. Two were from the professional dimensions, one was from the curriculum dimension, and one was from the institutional dimension.

The approved proposals reflect the variety possible under the consortium arrangement. Three of them include all member colleges,

while one included three institutions. The subject areas involved include reading, art, political science, and education. The level of project funding ranged from $1,500 to $5,000.

The second round of mini-grant submittals occurred in March, 1978. These projects are to be conducted during the Summer, 1978. Seven projects were submitted; one received approval; one, approval with minor modification, and one approved with major modifications. The impact of the coordinator is visible in the increased percentage of projects receiving favorable action.

Analysis of the approved projects indicates that one project has all consortium members participating, one has three participants, and one has two participants. Two projects were from the curriculum dimension, and one is from the professional. The disciplines involved are mathematics, nursing, and biological science. Funding ranges, again, from $1,500 to $5,000.

Along with the "mini-grant" aspect of the Consortium, the coordinator initiated a series of other processes required for the Consortium to realize its goals. First, Ms. Feltwell designed, edited, and published the first volume of the Consortium Newsletter. The publication will be issued quarterly. Second, she began the process of residential consultation. The coordinator spends a week on each campus working with faculty on project development. Third, the Consortium Office opened in quarters donated by Frostburg State College. A secretary was employed, and a telephone installed. All of the aforementioned processes are critical to the visibility and validity of the Consortium.

As the Consortium prepares for the third round of "mini-grant" submittals, a general assessment is in order. The coordinator is employed; a Consortium Office is in operation. The newsletter is a reality. Seven mini-grants have been funded and are in various stages of completion. It is accurate to conclude that the Appalachian Staff Development Consortium is a reality. The questions now to be answered are how do the achievements thus far contribute to the realization of the Consortium's goals and what is needed in the second year of the Consortium?

Conclusion: A Participative Action Program

The first year of the Appalachian Staff Development Consortium supports the validity of the use of the consortium concept to engage staff development needs. When the scope of the seven approved projects is compared with the monitary expenditure, the cost-efficiency of the Consortium stands out. The efficiency is made possible by the interaction of diverse personnel from a variety of institutions. It is doubtful whether any single institution would have profited as much had all the money expended been available on one campus.

The number of "mini-grants" submitted is an indicator of faculty recognition that staff development is important. The range of topics submitted underscores the pervasiveness of that understanding. The participating colleges were correct in their assessment that institutional self-renewal must precede regional development.

Observation of the nature and the extent of college interaction suggests that the four institutions are progressing toward the goal

of becoming an integrative regional development resource. It is too early to predict whether this goal will be realized, fully. In essence, however, more progress has occurred under the aegis of the Consortium than from any other attempt at inter-institutional cooperation.

The first year of Consortium activity may be considered a qualified success. The Consortium is projected to have a three-year life span under Appalachian funding. What are the primary challenges of the second year?

The initial challenge which must be engaged in year two is Consortium evaluation. Perceptions of achievement are not sufficient if the challenges of staff and regional development are to be met. The Consortium Board is preparing a request-for-proposal document to be circulated so that an evaluation consultant can be employed. The evaluation process will focus on the relationship between institutional self-renewal and regional development. Hopefully, an objective third-party evaluator will enhance the process of synergy.

Another challenge to be dealt with in year two will be the design of a model to continue inter-institutional cooperation beyond the period of Appalachian funding. Too many cooperative ventures collapse with the cessation of federal support. Two strategies have been discussed. The possibility exists that the Consortium will become a clearinghouse for grant preparation and implementation. Such activity would focus on cooperative needs analysis and integration with potential funding sources. The question remains whether this approach is congruent with the goals of the Consortium.

Another direction which will be explored is fostering cooperation in the projects which are funded with institutional resources. Whether such projects would reflect the needs of all Consortium members is unclear. Both strategies will be examined as part of the evaluation process.

The final challenge seems deceptively simple. The Consortium must continue to develop and produce. The initial year revealed much faculty interest and involvement. The coordinator and the board must nurture and develop faculty commitment so that, when the novelty fades, the development will continue.

In an assessment of staff development as a process for engaging change, this author stated:

> Through staff development (faculty) are renewed and, in turn, become agents for community renewal . . . . Also, the concept of a multi-component, integrated model is endemic to the theory and practice of staff development.[5]

These generalizations are critical to the future of the Appalachian Staff Development Consortium. To the extent that faculty can use their growth in the process of community development will the challenge of the Appalachian Regional Commission be met. Further, if the Consortium integrates the disparate elements of the model, the future becomes less vague. Of such hopes are ideals composed.

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APPENDIX

STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL FORMAT

I. Problem:

A. State in brief, succinct terms the nature of the task you seek to accomplish and its relationship to the consortium development objectives.

B. Spell out how the proposed project will meet the needs of students, curriculum, faculty and/or institutions.

II. Objectives:

A. Identify what you plan to do.

B. Include a specific description of planned outcomes; e.g., number of modules produced, presentations designed, etc.

C. List the time frames needed to complete the task; e.g., one week, two weeks, one semester, etc.

D. Include specific resources needed to meet the objectives; e.g., Audio Visual Equipment, Library, Clerical Services, etc.

E. If possible, design a contingency plan; i.e., certain time and certain resources = certain outcomes, etc.

III. Budget:

Itemize and explain.

IV. Dissemination Plan:

Describe how the ideas and accomplishments of the project will be shared among member institutions.

V. Evaluation:

How will you evaluate your project; e.g., materials developed, behavioral changes, report of accomplishments, etc.?

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